

A Before and After Story



The multiple use concept does not mean that people should use Forest Service land as a dump. Here, on land along the Coeur d'Alene River in Coeur d'Alene National Forest of northern Idaho, such debris as car bodies, cans, boxes and slaughterhouse waste have been discarded thoughtlessly. Two Forest Service employees size up clean-up job.



The scene a few weeks later. Forest Service has trucked junk away, seeded grass and fenced area off to prevent further dumping. The Coeur d'Alene Forest supervisor would have preferred spending the \$1,400 and many man-hours required in this cleanup on stream improvement for trout and campsite development. Photo story by Allan Taylor.

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MUEENCH

"He Was an Antipollution Activist"

Profiles in Conservation - Virgil Muench

His name was Virgil J. Muench and he lived in Green Bay, Wis. He worked long and hard for the cause of conservation, but often spoke modestly about these efforts. But, as news commentator Paul Harvey said on his news broadcast of March 31, "He (Muench) was an antipollution activist for 30 years before official Washington got excited about it. Men like Muench, former national director of the Izaak Walton League, and the late Joseph Wood Krutch . . . at least they lived long enough to see their protestations vindicated."

Muench had died the day before, at the age of 66. A retired attorney, he had been active in conservation most of his life and had combined his vocational and avocational interests into a powerful voice for the protection of the environment.

Said a close friend, William S. Thomas of Green Bay, after Muench had died: "What I will always remember 'Virg' for, aside from the specific battles he engaged in, was his great integrity and righteousness as opposed to those who sought the expedient solution. Even his adversaries on occasion would admit privately to him that he was right even though they had to publicly parrot their company propaganda. To my knowledge, Virg Muench was the first person in this area to take up the battle against pollution in any meaningful way, a battle he continued to the end."

A Newspaper Interview

His voice was heard for years, noted Ray Pagel, Green Bay Post-Gazette staff writer, and sometimes, heeded, in the Green Bay areas, where he lived, and even statewide and beyond. Yet he remained essentially a missionary without personal ambition, and in recent years often expressed disappointment that conversions did not come as abundantly as he felt the situation required.

Virgil Muench loved nature, took simple pleasure in the outdoors, and fought hard to protect our natural resources. His chief concern was for the water, but he developed a keen awareness of the overall aspects and implications of the ecological system.

Many an eloquent sermon on behalf of the environment was preached by him at hearings, conferences, meetings and casual encounters. Whether the audience numbered one or a thousand, his enthusiasm was high and freely spoken.

But Virg Muench was hardly an ecological activist in the prevailing connotation of the term. A lawyer by profession, he believed that the remedies he sought should be derived through due process and intelligent reaction.

He was born in Algoma in 1904. When I interviewed him in connection with a series of articles written several years ago, he spoke of his early life on the shore of Lake Michigan.

"I was entranced by the sound of the waves, and learned to love clean waters," he said. "My father was a commercial fisherman and by instinct a conservationist. Permits were available to take lake trout during spawning, but father said this was wrong - like cutting down the tree to get the apples. Dad was a responsible individual."

Graduating from the University of Marquette Law School in 1927, he practiced law in Manitowoc until 1938, when he moved to Green Bay.

Virg Muench early identified himself with the conservation movement, and particularly with the Izaak Walton League. He was president of the state organization when he fought the celebrated Namekagon Case through the state Supreme Court. He won a decision which established the concept of public domain in the waters of the state.

Muench was an active member of the local Audubon Society and was its delegate to the Brown County Conservation Alliance, which he helped found. The annual Alliance Award was among the many honors and recognitions he received. He was a member of the Wisconsin Society of Ornithology and of various other conservation-oriented groups.

Virg Muench was the first chairman of the Brown County Board's Water

Resources Committee, and presided at the long and tedious sessions which resulted in our Water Law Code. Pleading impaired health, he resigned about two years ago, and I had the honor of becoming his successor.

While he had slowed his pace considerably, we still saw him at various gatherings over the past year. He was in our class at the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay this winter for a pilot course on the scientific analysis of river systems.

My last word with him was at the next-to-last session of our class. He had borrowed a pencil from me, and returned it at the coffee break. "I'm going home; I'm not feeling well," he said. He died five days later on March 30.

Virgil Muench's name appears in numerous official reports heading the testimony he gave at hearings leading to enactment of our present state regulations on environmental matters. Here's a portion of his statement at the Lake Michigan conference in Green Bay June 30, 1966:

"I do not believe the present sad state of our polluted waterways is due to public indifference. I think it has come about much the same as a fatal disease sometimes strikes, exhibiting at the onset mere seemingly harmless symptoms which are overlooked because of ignorance rather than of indifference . . ."

"The cost to the public to abate pollution continues to grow year by year and will continue to mount until the point is reached where we either have spent enough on abatement to reverse the trend or ultimately be destroyed by it."

Muench frequently lashed out at industry, but he was also a practical man. At his hearing he said:

"We all know it is because of the magnificent waters that the huge paper industry has flourished here. The public is well aware of the importance of this industry to the economy and welfare of the people as well as to the State of Wisconsin.

"No one expects the paper industry to do the impossible. The record

shows that some mills have made great strides in treating their wastes. But the record also shows that some mills made only what can be called token efforts, as shown by the year to year extensions of time granted to them by the Committee on Water Pollution since 1949."

And with this he concluded his testimony:

"Our heritage in clean waters is too precious to be dissipated by our failure to do the things we can do and ought to do. Time is running out."

And for Virg Muench, his time here has run out, but many friends know well that his voice was not in vain.

(Portions of the above article are excerpted from an article in the Green Bay Post-Gazette, written by staff writer Ray Pagel. It is reprinted here with their permission.)

SCS Meeting

ANKENY, Iowa—"The Shape of Things to Come" will be the theme for the 26th annual meeting of the Soil Conservation Society of America, August 15-18, at the Sheraton-Columbus Hotel in Columbus, Ohio.

Hosts for the meeting will be members of the Society's All-Ohio Chapter.

The tentative program format includes registration and a reception on Sunday, August 15, followed by general sessions on Monday, tours on Tuesday, concurrent and general sessions on Wednesday, and a banquet on Wednesday night.

During the meeting the Society will name its fellow and honorary members for 1971 and announce the recipients of 20 Gildea Scholarships in Conservation for the 1971-1972 school year. The winner of the second annual Donald A. Williams Soil Conservation Scholarship will be announced also.

Chairman of the meeting program committee is the Society's President-elect, J.R. Johnston of Bushland, Texas.